Misconceptions Concerning the Tallest Buildings in the State of Vermont

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Abstract

This paper shines light on the collective misconception that Decker Towers in Burlington, Vermont is the tallest building in the state. The confusion arose during the creation of the Wikipedia page "List of tallest buildings in Vermont". The editors of the article mistakenly started ranking buildings based on floor count, instead of height. The Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat (CTBUH), an international organization often recognized as the governing body concerning building heights, states that floor count is not an accurate ranking system and that counting by physical height is superior and standard. The practice of ranking by building height is followed by all other "tallest building" Wikipedia articles, as well as the tallest building rankings on the CTBUH website. Because the Vermont buildings were ranked by floor count, Decker Towers, at 11 floors, was ranked tallest, and soon became known as the tallest building in Vermont through Google's use of Wikipedia data in search results. Ranking by height, there are buildings in Vermont that are taller than Decker Towers, most being churches. Upon further investigation, the tallest building in Vermont is Grace Church in Rutland at 199 feet tall.

1. Introduction

When searching for the "tallest building in Vermont" on Google, the search results will show Decker Towers or the upcoming CityPlace development in Burlington. There are a myriad of sources claiming Decker Towers to be the tallest building in Vermont, or that CityPlace will soon take Decker Towers' title (Huntley 2023; Tim 2024; Walsh 2015; Bendavid 2023). These claims are all false. This belief comes from the Wikipedia article "List of tallest buildings in Vermont". The editors of the article ranked the buildings by floor count, which puts the 11-story Decker Towers at the #1 spot. This method of ranking is not consistent with other "tallest buildings" lists on Wikipedia. It is also recognized as an inferior and inaccurate system of ranking by The Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat (CTBUH), an international organization often recognized as the governing body concerning building heights (Nambiar 2012; Talanova & Boyette 2012, Dunlap 2012). They state,"[the] number of floors is a poor indicator of defining a tall building due to the changing floor-to-floor height between differing buildings and functions," ("Tall Building Criteria," n.d.). If counted by physical height, many buildings in Vermont are taller than Decker Towers or CityPlace.

The data from the Wikipedia ranking of Vermont's tallest buildings, with its inaccurate placements, spread throughout the internet and fueled misinformation concerning the matter. Google searches often pull from Wikipedia articles for their top results (Kopp n.d.). When someone searches for the "tallest building in Vermont", Google pulls from the Wikipedia article "List of tallest buildings in Vermont" (and other relevant Wikipedia articles), and incorrectly tells the user that Decker Towers is the tallest building in Vermont (results may vary with Google's A.I. assistant). Because of this, the misconception spread, and it soon entered the public imagination. Decker Towers soon appeared on many lists displaying the tallest building in each U.S. state, displayed alongside buildings ranked by their physical heights, not by floor count

(Abadi 2018; “List of tallest buildings by U.S. state and territory” 2025). This inadvertently covered the fact that Decker Towers is ranked by floor count, and publications started treating the building as if it was the tallest by height. The new CityPlace development in Burlington is expected to rise taller than Decker Towers, but it also contains 11 floors. Still, the media says that CityPlace will soon be Vermont’s new tallest building (Huntley 2023), although the only reason Decker Towers is thought of as the tallest building is because of its floor count. This discrepancy causes a large misinformation echo chamber that repeatedly states that either one of these buildings is the tallest building in Vermont. Although many think they are, neither Decker Towers nor CityPlace is the tallest building in Vermont, and this myth was produced by a faulty Wikipedia ranking that went unchecked for over 10 years (“List of tallest buildings in Vermont: Revision history”, n.d.).

2. Findings

Ranking the tallest buildings in Vermont by height produces an accurate list. Ranking by height, the tallest building in Vermont is the Grace Church in Rutland, at 199 feet tall (Polly, 2021). Many buildings are taller than the 116.3-foot-tall Decker Towers. Unfortunately, the sources on Vermont building heights are scarce. Many buildings have the potential to rank on the list* (First Baptist Church in Rutland, The Nest in Burlington, UVM’s Miller Building, Bethany United Church of Christ in Montpelier, and others), but their heights are not publicly available. Using available sources, here are the current rankings (as of 3/4/2025):

Rank	Building	Height	Floors	Location	Year built	Notes
1	Grace Church	199 feet	1	Rutland	1860	Church
2=	Ira Allen Chapel	170 feet	1	Burlington	1925	Church
2=	Unitarian Church	170 feet	1	Burlington	1816	Church
4	Stowe Community Church	165 feet	1	Stowe	1863	Church
5=	Montpelier City Hall	150 feet	4	Montpelier	1909	
5=	Old Mill	150 feet	4	Burlington	1825	
7	First Methodist Church	147 feet	1	Burlington	1869	
8	Vermont State House	136 feet	2	Montpelier	1859	
9	Congregational Church	135 feet	1	Middlebury	1809	Church
10	Masonic Temple	130 feet	5	Burlington	1898	
11	Sheldon Towers	124 feet	10	Rutland	1972	
12	Decker Towers	116.3 feet	11	Burlington	1971	
13	100 Bank Street	116 feet	8	Burlington		Roof mechanics included in height**
14	First Baptist Church	110 feet	1	Burlington	1864	Church

15	The Westlake Residences	107.5 feet	9	Burlington	2007	Roof mechanics included in height
16=	St. Mary Star of the Sea	105 feet	1	Newport	1904	Church
16=	Corporate Plaza (Key Bank)	105 feet	8	Burlington	1988	
18	Three Cathedral Square	103.3 feet	10	Burlington	1979	Roof mechanics included in height
19	Service Building	101 feet	7	Rutland	1930	

This list is incomplete and subject to change for the reasons stated above.

3. The Definition of a Building

Some may challenge the validity of the ranking above. The majority of tall buildings in Vermont are churches. It is worth mentioning that the list does not include any radio towers, chimneys, wind turbines, or any such structure. This is because they qualify as structures, not buildings. The CTBUH states that for something to be classified as a building, "at least 50 percent of its height must be occupiable***" (Tall Building Characteristics, n.d.). Some may suggest that churches don't count because the majority of their height comes from their towers or spires, not habitable space. In theory, this claim is backed by CTBUH's definition of a building, but churches are consistently recognized as buildings by the CTBUH and are included in the organization's rankings (The 100 Tallest Completed Buildings in Germany in 2025, 2025; The 100 Tallest Completed Buildings in Denmark in 2025, 2025). Churches are already recognized as the tallest buildings in other U.S. states/territories, such as Maine's Saint Joseph's Church (Pierce, 2017), and the District of Columbia's National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception (National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, n.d.). Churches are universally accepted as buildings, and if they were deemed structures it would require a massive effort from the CTBUH and all other parties to remove and correct most lists. Even if churches are deemed ineligible for building status, the title of tallest building in Vermont would be tied between Montpelier's City Hall and UVM's Old Mill.

4. Conclusion

The tallest building in Vermont is not Decker Towers, nor will it be CityPlace. The evidence suggests it is Grace Church in Rutland. The myth came about from a faulty Wikipedia article that incorrectly ranked the tallest buildings in Vermont, putting Decker Towers on top. Google's search engine took this data and presented it to users for over a decade, which perpetuated the lie. This is now one of the numerous instances of misinformation spreading throughout the internet from Wikipedia. More investigation is needed to flesh out the ranking, as there are certainly more tall churches in Vermont that are being overlooked. Similar investigations may be needed in states with similar building trends, such as Maine, New Hampshire, or Wyoming. Many tall churches are commonplace in rural areas that may be overlooked as notable tall buildings in their state.

Footnotes

*The list includes any building that is at least 100 feet tall
**According to the CTBUH, roof mechanics and antennas are to be omitted from building heights, and rather the height stops at the highest permanent feature of the building (Measuring Tall Building Height, n.d.).
***Using CTBUH's definition of "occupiable": this is intended to recognize conditioned space which is designed to be safely and legally occupied by residents, workers, or other building users on a consistent basis. It does not include service or mechanical areas which experience occasional maintenance access, etc.

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